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CROMLEAC AT GLEANN-NA-CLOICHE-LEITHE

TRANSACTIONS
OF THE
KILKENNY ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY,
FOR THE YEAR 1850.

PRIMÆVAL PERIOD.

CROMLEAC.

BY THE REV. JAMES GRAVES.

[*Read at the Meeting of November 6th.*]

As one of the principal objects of this Society is to accumulate topographical information, more especially with regard to monuments hitherto undescribed, I beg to lay before the meeting a drawing of the *Cromleac* (*Cromleac*) at *Gleann-na-cloiche-leithe* (*Gleann-na-cloiche-leithe*), the existence of which was placed on record by the Rev. P. Moore in the Transactions of 1849 (p. 27). This *Cromleac*, which is a very fine and characteristic specimen of that class of monument, is situated in the County of Kilkenny, about one and a-half miles from Rosbercon, on the declivity of a valley named, doubtless from this remain of primæval antiquity, *Gleann-na-cloiche-leithe* (pronounced *Gleann-na-cloiche-leithe*), "the Valley of the Grey Stone." The view from the *Cromleac* is somewhat wild and lonely. The highest point of this ancient monumental structure measures eight feet from the surface of the field; the supporting stones are five in number. The highest stone measures five feet at its tallest point, four at its lowest, is five feet wide, and one foot thick; the next in height measures four feet by three, by one foot thick. The covering-stone is supported at its northern extremity by these two masses of rock, and rests at its southern or lowest point on a third, measuring six feet by five, which inclines very much to the north. The points of contact between the covering-stone, and this, its lowest support, are only two, and at one of them a small stone is inserted between. There is another upright-stone in the group, but it bears no part of the weight. The covering-stone is nine feet ten

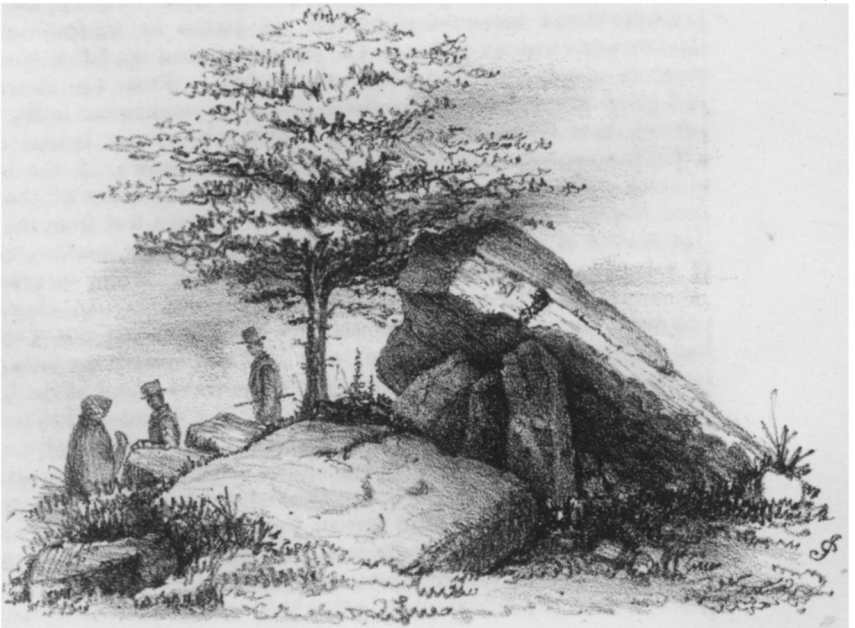
inches long, seven feet wide, and averages three feet in thickness. Two of the uprights are slate rock, a third granite; the covering-stone is also an impure granite. The latter slopes toward the south at an angle of 40 degrees from the horizon, and, balanced, as it is, on only two points at its lower end, must have required great engineering skill to fix it permanently in its present position. It is very difficult to stand on its sloping and uneven surface, which could never have been intended to accommodate a victim and priest. The structure is evidently a tomb, and not an altar.

I next beg to exhibit sketches of two *Cromleacs* hitherto unnoticed. They are both situate on the lands of **Баіле-Уі-Лобхра**, (*Baile-Ui-Lobhra*), Ballylowra, in the parish of Jerpoint-Church, and barony of Knocktopher. The first to which I shall call attention, stands on the lands of a respectable farmer named John Power, immediately beneath the steep rocky hill, which there runs nearly parallel with the Waterford and Kilkenny railroad, not far from the Jerpoint-hill station. At some period beyond the memory of man, the covering-stone of this *Cromleac* has slipped from its supporters in the direction of the dip or incline originally given to it, and now rests in a sloping position against three of the five upright-stones on which it had been originally poised; two others, and by far the largest, of which, lie prostrate, having fallen in the same direction. The dimensions of the covering-stone are twelve feet by eight feet six inches—average thickness, three feet. Two of the remaining uprights measure, respectively, in height five feet six inches, and four feet above the present surface of the field. The largest of the prostrate stones measures eight feet six inches by six feet—average thickness one foot six inches. The highest point of the fallen covering-stone is about nine feet above the surface. From the dimensions just given it is plain that the *Baile-Ui-Lobhra* monument must, when perfect, have been a very large one; not much inferior indeed to the gigantic *Cromleac* standing on the lands of Harristown, in the barony of Iverk, called **Леаc ан Скал** (*Leac an Scail*), the Stone of the hero, *Scal Balbh*, the highest point of which is eighteen feet from the base. The masses of rock which compose the Ballylowra *Cromleac*, consist of a hard sandstone, similar to the large blocks which lie in profusion on the hill-side above it, and from which it is certain they were originally obtained. I was informed by Mr. Power that this *Cromleac* had been originally connected with a *Rath*, which his father had levelled; a portion of the circular fence may still be traced at the foot of the hill, and the *Cromleac* stood, not in the centre, but at that point of the circumference farthest from the hill-side. When the *Rath* was first broken up, portions of the clay and stones shewed marks of the action of fire, but all trace of this has been obliterated by repeated tillage.

About a quarter of a mile beyond the Ballylowra *Cromleac*, and in a direct line towards Derrynahinch old Church, there is another ancient monument, which seems to represent the link between the *Cromleac* and those cists or sepulchral chambers which are occasionally discovered



CLOCH-NA-GOBHAR



CROMLEAC, BALLYLOWRA

beneath the surface of the earth. As will appear by the sketch, it is of very peculiar construction—one end of the covering-stone resting on the rocky surface of the hill, and the other on two uprights. The covering-stone is very massive, measuring twelve feet four inches long, by six feet ten wide—average thickness one foot eight inches. This *Cromleac* stands on the lands of John Carrol, and is known amongst the peasantry as *Cloc-na-n-gobhar* (*Cloch-na-n-gobhar*)—"the Goat's Stone."

The entire of this retired district of our county is very rich in primæval remains, and deserves accurate examination. The adjacent townland of Upper Derrynahinch contained the ancient sepulchre known as *Leaba Dhiarmada* (*Leaba Dhiarmada*), (see Transactions for 1849, p. 17). A short time since there existed on the lands of the widow Follis, in the townland of Jerpoint-hill, another remain of this nature, known as *Leaba Fíanna* (*Leaba Fianna*), "the Fiann's or Giant's Bed." This, as well as *Leaba Dhiarmada*, has lately been obliterated. But not only from the surface of our island, but also from the minds of its present inhabitants, are the memorials of its primæval races rapidly vanishing; an old man who pointed out to me the site of *Leaba Fianna*, remarked of the dwellers in the adjacent hamlet, 'the men' (meaning his own contemporaries) 'are all dead, Sir; and the boys and women know nothing at all about it.' And so, on inquiring, it proved to be—the hamlet's population consisting, strangely enough, of three widows with their families, who lived quite unaware that there were giants in those days, or that one of these *great* men, alias *big* men, had had his last resting place on their land. Hence the necessity of recording what still remains of our ancient folk-lore.

Mr. D. Byrne sent a plan and description of an exceedingly curious *Cromleac*, situate on the top of Coolrus hill, in the parish of Ballyadams, Queen's County. The land on which it stands was recently rented by a man named Wm. Murphy, but is now in the hands of the Marquis of Lansdowne, the proprietor. Mr. Byrne supposed that *Coolrus-hill* was a corruption of an ancient Irish name, and with great probability conjectured that the proper designation was *Cnoc-Cille-Ruir* (*Cnoc-Cille-Ruis*, the hill of the Elder-wood), or *Cnoc-Coll-Ruir* (*Cnoc-Coll-Ruis*, the hill of the Hazel and Elder).—Some time since, a road was made adjoining the south side of the *Cromleac*, and the removal of the earth caused the altar or upper stone to slip from its original position, and it now rests with its southern edge on the road side, the other end supported by two upright stones measuring, respectively, four feet and five feet in height. At no time could it (the altar-stone) have been more than one foot and a-half higher than the surface of the hill, but under-

neath it was a square pit, sunk about five feet, faced by large flags and dry masonry which seemed to be of fully equal antiquity with the *Cromleac* itself. The upper edge of the flags forming this pit, was level with the surface of the hill, and when the upper stone was in its original position about two feet of the pit was left uncovered to the north. The upper stone measured eight feet by six and a-half, and was twelve inches in thickness.—To the east a passage, like a sewer, about three feet square, extended nine feet in an easterly direction from the pit, and opened on the surface of the hill. It was formed of flags and dry masonry well built, and covered over, and had not any communication with the pit, being separated therefrom by the large flag which formed the east side thereof. Adjoining the west side of the pit two flags of about three feet high were firmly fixed in the earth, in a chair-like fashion; close to these were discovered the calcined remains of a considerable quantity of the bones of some large animals. At about one hundred and twenty feet radius from the *Cromleac*, formerly stood a circle of large upright flag-stones, now removed. Mr. Byrne was informed by an old man named Andrew Murphy, resident on the spot, that he had found and opened, to the south-east of the *Cromleac*, many small rectangular cists or receptacles, formed of six flags, and containing burned bones, but no trace of urns, arms, or ornaments.—The name by which this remain of antiquity is known at present amongst the peasantry is the “*Ass’s Manger*,” evidently a modern appellation.—There is a strange and highly interesting belief regarding this remain of antiquity prevalent amongst the people. They assert that, frequently, even on an afternoon while it is light, funerals are seen passing the *Cromleac*; the procession appears for the first time a few perches above the *Cromleac* to the west, and having proceeded a few perches below the monument, as far as the spot where the cists, already alluded to, have been found, it invariably disappears. Mr. Byrne stated that he had made much inquiry about this strange matter, and had been at all times assured by the peasantry of its perfect truth!

Mr. James Robertson presented a drawing of the *Cromleac* at Brownshill, about a mile and a-half from Carlow; it consisted of an immense rock-stone, raised on edge from its native bed, and supported at its east-end by three rude columns. At a small distance was another pillar standing alone, nearly round, and five feet in height. The covering-stone was twenty-two feet ten inches long, eighteen feet nine inches wide, and four feet six inches thick at the upper part, containing nearly two thousand cubic feet of stone, weighing about ninety tons, and making with the horizon, an angle of thirty-four degrees.